SPORT

Doue, Dembele light up first Paris derby in over 35 years

PARIS: Desire Doue and Ousmane Dembele marked their returns to the Paris St Germain starting XI by securing a 2-1 win over Paris FC on Sunday as the French capital enjoyed its first top-flight derby since 1990.

Victory for Luis Enrique's second-placed PSG, thanks to goals either side of half-time by Doue and Dembele, took them back to within one point of surprise league leaders Lens.

"I think it was Ousmane's best game [of the season] tonight, he's back to his best," Luis Enrique said of his star attacker who has endured an injury-plagued campaign.

The last time PSG lost at home to a newly-promoted side was in May 2010 when they went down 3-1 to Montpellier. But there were few chances of that streak being broken in the first top-division Paris derby since February 25, 1990, when Racing Paris 1 beat PSG 2-1 at the Parc des Princes home that they shared.

None of the starters on either side at the Parc on Sunday were born when that match took place, and both clubs are a world away from where they were nearly 36 years ago.

PSG, backed by Qatar since 2011, have won 12 of their 13 French domestic crowns since then, as well as the Champions League last season.

If they are the top dogs in the City of Light, PFC's solid showing firmly cemented their place as the second strongest side in Paris after they were invested in by the Arnault family — owners of LVMH — last season and promptly won promotion to Ligue 1.

Dominant PSG thought they had a penalty midway through the opening period when Doue burst into the box and was felled by Otavio but a VAR review adjudged the initial contact to have been outside the box.

But the 20-year-old left nothing up to VAR the next time he found himself driving into the PFC area as he perfectly timed his run onto Fabian Ruiz's pass on 45 minutes and hammered the ball past Kevin Trapp.

The second period started in chaotic fashion as Illya Zabarnyi upended Alimami Gory in the box and Willem Geubbels levelled for the visitors on 51 minutes.

Parity lasted only two minutes, however, as Ballon d'Or holder Dembele cut in and struck a left-footed effort, which took a huge deflection on its way past a helpless Trapp and PSG were able to keep PFC at arm's length to win a long-awaited encounter.

Red cards either side of the interval for Arthur Vermeeren and Bilal Nadir, coupled with a Fabien Centonze strike and a late Remy Cabella penalty, condemned Olympique de Marseille to a 2-0 defeat to lowly Nantes as Roberto De Zerbi's team remain eight points off the pace.

Crucially, the loss was also a missed opportunity for third-placed Marseille to open up a gap with the chasing pack for the final automatic Champions League qualification spot as they failed to capitalise on fourth-placed Lille's 2-0 defeat to Rennes on Saturday.

With just their third victory of the season, Nantes have climbed out of the relegation zone at the expense of Auxerre, who lost 2-0 at Brest later in the day.

Elsewhere, Lorient drew 1-1 with bottom-side Metz and Le Havre beat Angers 2-1.—AFP

MANCHESTER: Chelsea's Enzo Fernandez (R) scores past Manchester City goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma during their Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium.—Reuters

Chelsea stalemate leaves City's title charge running out of gas

MANCHESTER: Managerless Chelsea handed London rivals Arsenal a welcome boost in the Premier League title race as Enzo Fernandez struck a stoppage-time equaliser that prevented Manchester City closing the gap at the top to four points on Sunday.

City led through a Tijjani Reijnders goal in the first half and it looked like being enough for them to cut into Arsenal's lead at the summit, but Fernandez pounced to give Chelsea a worthy 1-1 draw, three days after the club sacked coach Enzo Maresca.

Fernandez's goal at a freezing Etihad Stadium means Arsenal end a packed festive programme with a six-point lead. They have 48 points from 20 games with City and Aston Villa on 42.

Pep Guardiola's City had ramped up the pressure on Arsenal with a six-game winning run and were within touching distance heading into Christmas prior to drawing a blank in a 0-0 draw at Sunderland on January 1.

And their hunt of Arsenal has come off the rails in four damaging days for City in more ways than one.

On top of four dropped points, centre-backs Josko Gvardiol and Ruben Dias limped off in the second half against Chelsea to leave Guardiola with threadbare options at the back.

"Of course I have concerns. Have you seen the bench today? It's three players for the academy and now we will have more," said Guardiola. "We don't have players. That is the truth."

During his trophy-littered decade in charge, Guardiola has made a habit of constantly rotating his City sides to keep his players as fresh as possible.

That has changed this season. His consistency of selection helped bring City back into title contention after losing two of their first three games of the campaign.

But they appear to be running out of gas in the midst of English football's gruelling winter schedule.

City have played just two of their nine games in January with trips to Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool to follow in early February.

"It's frustrating of course but at the end it is what it is," City midfielder Rodri, whose return to action after injury is some comfort for Guardiola, said. "We created enough chances to win the game three or four nil, but this is football."

Just days after Chelsea parted company with Maresca, the Blues were managed by Under-21 coach Calum McFarlane.

McFarlane will never forget his first senior match as a manager after frustrating the decorated Guardiola.

But despite the damage McFarlane inflicted on Guardiola's title dreams, Strasbourg boss Liam Rosenior remains the leading candidate to replace Maresca on a permanent basis.

"Chelsea is a world champion team. It is not academy players there. Top class players. So to have control for 90 minutes against a team is so, so difficult," Guardiola said. "We missed chances in the second half. Our talented players tried to finish the game but we could not do that."

City, who host Brighton & Hove Albion on Wednesday, will hope for a favour from Liverpool on Thursday when Arne Slot's men face Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium.

"We recover people and we see on Wednesday," Guardiola said of City's title chances.—Agencies

Inter surge past Bologna to reclaim summit

ROME: Inter Milan claimed a commanding 3-1 home win over Bologna on Sunday to return to the top of Serie A in what is shaping up to be an increasingly intense title race.

With the victory, Inter took the lead in the table on 39 points, one clear of city rivals AC Milan, who had taken provisional control of the Italian summit with a 1-0 win at Cagliari on Friday, with the campaign now two matches from the halfway mark.

Defending champions Napoli sit third, two points shy of Inter, after a 2-0 win at Lazio earlier Sunday.

Inter took a deserved lead six minutes before the break when Lautaro Martinez, falling under a challenge, managed to slide the ball across to Piotr Zielinski, who struck confidently from just outside the box to find the net.

Three minutes after the restart, Inter doubled their advantage from a corner, as Martinez timed his run perfectly and powered a header into the net.

Bologna goalkeeper Federico Ravaglia produced a string of saves to keep the deficit from growing but the resistance finally broke in the 74th minute when Marcus Thuram made it three for Inter, his shoulder glancing a corner over the line.

Santiago Castro pulled one back for Bologna seven minutes before stoppage time but Inter remained firmly in control, while Bologna were indebted to Ravaglia for keeping the scoreline respectable.

Earlier Napoli kept the wheels on their title defence after overcoming Lazio whose 66-year-old coach Maurizio Sarri was back in the dugout despite undergoing heart-surgery on Monday.

Antonio Conte's men secured a fifth win in six outings with both goals coming in the first half from Leonardo Spinazzola and Amir Rrahmani. It was a bad-tempered game with three red cards late on as tempers flared in pouring rain.

Napoli seized control in the 14th minute when a teasing cross drifted to the back post, where an unmarked Spinazzola fired a volley home to give the visitors the lead.

Conte's side underlined their dominance in the 32nd minute when a free kick was floated into the box and Rrahmani headed into the bottom corner to double the visitors' lead.

Tijjani Noslin and Adam Marusic received marching orders for Lazio in a heated end and Napoli's Pasquale Mazzocchi also walked in the closing stages.

Elsewhere on Sunday, Italy's Moise Kean scored in stoppage time to earn Fiorentina a 1-0 home win over Cremonese to lift them off the foot of the table, leapfrogging Pisa.

But La Viola, who celebrate their 100th anniversary next season, are still in troubled waters, three points adrift of safety from relegation.

Third from bottom Hellas Verona fell to a 3-0 home defeat to mid-table Torino.—Agencies

U-17 national snooker begins

KARACHI: As many as 11 players were in action here at the Jahangir Khan Sports Complex on Monday as the U-17 National Snooker Championship got underway.

The players divided into three groups, with two players from each to qualify for the knockout rounds.

On the opening day, Punjab's M. Kashan lead Group 'A', while his unit mates Farhan Ali and and Musa Tanveer topped Group 'B' and Group 'C'.

Farhan beat Sindh's Subhan Akbar 3-0 (75-39, 64-15, 82-01) before getting the better of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Bilal Ahmed 3-0 (64-16, 63-24, 80-24).

Musa Tanveer downed KP's Saifuddin 3-1 (32-33, 59-10, 62-9, 51-27) and beat Balochistan's M. Muaaz 3-0 (46-6, 62-26, 57-19).

Kashan meanwhile triumphed over Sindh's Ayan Ali 3-1 (68-08, 73-55, 20-52, 58-56) and beat Balochistan's M. Saad 3-0 (93-22(40), 56-21, 74-8).

Other results:

Ayan Ali (Sindh) bt M Saad (Balochistan) 3-1 (50-26, 36-60, 54-27, 59-56); Daniyal Shahzad (Islamabad) bt Bilal Ahmed (KP) 3-0 (70-03, 57-19, 62-20); Rehan Ali (Sindh) bt M. Muaaz (Balochistan) 3-1 (75-14, 54-26, 30-69, 71-06); M. Daniyal Shahzad (Islamabad) bt Subhan Akbar (Sindh) 3-0 (57-16, 78-21, 54-21); Rehan Ali (Sindh) bt Saif Uddin (KP) 3-0 (41-31, 58-35, 58-29).—Sports Reporter

Gonzalo treble helps Real thrash Betis, Atletico hopes dented

MADRID: Gonzalo Garcia bagged a hat-trick for Real Madrid as they beat Real Betis 5-1 on Sunday to stay on La Liga leaders Barcelona's tail.

Spanish striker Garcia, filling in for the injured Kylian Mbappe, headed in Rodrygo's precise cross for a deserved lead after 20 minutes and then volleyed home a superb second early in the second half to give Real a commanding lead.

Raul Asencio further extended Xabi Alonso's side's advantage with a header from another Rodrygo delivery before Cucho Hernandez pulled one back for Manuel Pellegrini's visitors, sixth.

Real youth academy product Garcia, who lit up last year's FIFA Club World Cup with four goals, completed his hat-trick after 82 minutes with a clever flicked finish to delight fans at the Santiago Bernabeu, with Fran Garcia notching a fifth in stoppage time.

Real, second, cut Barca's lead back down to four points after the champions edged Espanyol 2-0 in a Catalan derby on Saturday. Atletico Madrid, fourth, were held 1-1 at Real Sociedad later on.

Real's victory eased the pressure on Alonso, who scraped through to 2026 at the helm despite reports he was on the verge of being sacked after a run of inconsistent form,

"It's a great stat, that the five goals were scored by academy players, it shows the great work being done there," said Alonso.

"In Gonzalo's case, with his hat-trick, I'm very happy for him and the team, it was an important and deserved win."

Real next face rivals Atletico in the Spanish Super Cup semi-finals in Saudi Arabia on Thursday.

Diego Simeone's side could only manage a draw at Sociedad, leaving them 11 points behind leaders Barca.

"This isn't enough. We have to analyse our mistakes and improve," Atletico forward Giuliano Simeone said. "Now we have to rest. There's not long to go until the next match. We have to focus on that match against Real."

Atletico pulled level with third-placed Villarreal on 38 points but have played two more matches than them and lost more ground in the title race.

Alexander Sorloth headed Atletico ahead early in the second half but Goncalo Guedes levelled five minutes later to secure Real Sociedad's American coach Pellegrino Matarazzo a point in his first game at the helm.—Agencies

KRL, OGDCL, Wapda and SBP win

KARACHI: Khan Research Laboratories (KRL) snatched victory from the jaws of defeat thanks to a dramatic Sahir Associates collapse in their President's Trophy second-round match here at the National Bank Stadium on Monday.

Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL), Wapda and State Bank of Pakistan also registered wins as the round concluded.

Cruising at 142-4 in pursuit of 228, Sahir Associates lost six wickets for 79 runs in the space of 15 overs as KRL pacer Mohammad Hamza took 6-72 and fellow fast bowler Arshad Iqbal bagged 3-62 to give their team a six-run win.

At the UBL Sports Complex, OGDCL chased down 112 against Pakistan Television — thanks to Haroon Arshad's 40 off 45 — to win by eight wickets. Earlier, pacer Mohammad Umar took 4-57 to see PTV fold for 214.

At the NBP Sports Complex, Kashif Bhatti registered figures of 5-20 to help SBP bundle out Ghani Glass for 133 to win by 202 runs. Earlier, SBP built on to their overnight score of 194-3 to post a second-innings total of 307, thanks to Ghazi Ghori's 138 off 139.

Wapda, meanwhile, went top of the tournament standings thanks to an eight-wicket win over Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited as they chased the 55-run target with ease. It was earlier set up by Naqeebullah's 4-47, that saw SNGPL bowled out for 183 at the State Bank Stadium.—Sports Reporter

Medvedev in great touch as he starts 2026 with Brisbane cruise

BRISBANE: Top seed Daniil Medvedev cruised into the second round of the Brisbane International on Monday while defending champion Jiri Lehecka outlasted fellow Czech Tomas Machac over three sets.

World number 13 Medvedev looked in ominous form as he demolished Hungary's Marton Fucsovics 6-2, 6-3 in just 69 minutes in the warm-up tournament for the Australian Open which begins on January 18.

Russian Medvedev next plays American Frances Tiafoe.

Lehecka, the third seed, saw off Machac 6-4, 6-7 (5/7), 6-2 in almost two-and-a-half hours. The 24-year-old has won two tournaments in his career, both in Australia.

Lehecka now plays American Sebastian Korda, who beat Monaco's Valentin Vacherot 7-6 (7/1), 6-3.

Alex Michelsen survived a tough battle against Australian qualifier James Duckworth 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 and will next face fellow American Learner Tien.

In the women's draw, qualifying lucky loser Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan beat American Hailey Baptiste 6-2, 6-4 to set up a second-round clash with Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk.

Chinese qualifier Zhang Shuai, 36, turned back the clock when she beat Ashlyn Krueger of the US 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

She will now face former champion and world number five Elena Rybakina.—AFP

Major players make semis at ranking tennis

By Our Sports Reporter

ISLAMABAD: All prominent players after winning their respective matches moved into the men's singles semi-finals of the 11th edition of Begum Kulsum Saifullah Khan National Ranking Tennis Championship here at the PTF Tennis Complex on Monday.

Yousuf Khalil defeated Barkatullah 6-0, 7-6(5) while Mohammad Shoaib outclassed Ahmad Nael 6-3, 6-2.

Veteran Aqeel Khan faced strong resistance by Nadir Mirza before the former won the match 6-4, 6-4 to make last four. In a thrilling encounter, Muzammil Murtaza edged past Abubakar Talha 6-4, 5-7, 6-4.

Meanwhile, Mahin Aftab Qureshi defeated Amna Ali 6-2, 6-3 in the women's singles semi-final to set up a final with Soha Ali who overcame Sheeza Sajid in 7-5, 6-2 in the other last-four match.

Matches of other categories were also held during the day.

Results:

Boys U-18 (quarter-finals): Ahtesham Humayun bt Zohaib Afzal Malik 7-6(1), 6-3; Hamza Roman bt Mohammad Yahya 6-1, 6-0; Hassan Usmani bt Mohammad Haziq 6-4, 5-7, 6-3; Abubakar Talha bt Abdul Basit 6-3, 6-0

Boys 14 & under (quarter-finals): Mohammad Junaid bt Meer Abbas 4-0, 2-4, 4-1; Ohade Mustafa bt Mohammad Aayan 1-4, 5-3, 4-0; Mohammad Ibraheem Gill bt Mohammad Faizan 4-1, 4-2; Mohammad Muaz bt Zayd Zaman 4-1, 4-0

Girls 14 & under (semi-finals): Khadija Khalil bt Anaya Khan 4-2, 4-0; Aimen Rehan bt Eman Shahbaz 4-1, 4-0.

Boys 12 & under (quarter-finals): Mohammad Aayan bt Mohammad Faizan 0-4, 4-1, 4-2; Behroze Maimoon bt Ashter Alam 4-0, 5-4(8); Majid Ali bt Umer Zaman 4-0, 4-1; Mohammad Danyal bt Mohammad Ibraheem Gill 4-2, 4-2.

Hosts Morocco reach quarters as Cameroon knock South Africa out

RABAT: A Brahim Diaz goal sent Morocco through to the Africa Cup of Nations quarter-finals at Tanzania's expense on Sunday, with Cameroon now standing in the way of the hosts after the Indomitable Lions edged South Africa 2-1 in their last-16 clash.

Real Madrid winger Diaz scored once in each of Morocco's three group matches at the tournament and maintained his goal-a-game record with the 64th-minute strike that sealed a 1-0 victory at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat.

He is the first Moroccan player to find the net in four consecutive AFCON matches and his celebrations included holding up a shirt belonging to injured midfielder Azzedine Ounahi.

Diaz later dedicated the last-16 victory to his teammate, who arrived at the stadium using crutches and has been ruled out of the rest of the competition with a calf injury.

The goal came after Morocco squandered numerous chances while stretching their unbeaten run to 23 matches — their last loss was to South Africa at the 2024 AFCON.

Paris St Germain defender Achraf Hakimi, the African player of the year, set up the winning goal as he made his first start in the tournament having recovered from an ankle injury.

"The reading of the game is simple: we only started playing in the second half but we hands down deserved to go through," said Morocco coach Walid Regragui.

It was a valiant effort from Tanzania in their first ever appearance in the knockout stages, but the 2027 co-hosts head home having still never won a game at the Cup of Nations in 13 attempts.

"I am so proud of what my team produced," said Tanzania's Argentinian coach Miguel Angel Gamondi. "They showed that the gap between Morocco and us is not as big as people think. We will come back stronger, I am convinced of that."

Morocco will now face Cameroon on Friday after the Indomitable Lions got the better of South Africa at Al Medina Stadium across Rabat in Sunday's late game.

Goals either side of half-time by Junior Tchamadeu and Christian Kofane made the difference for Cameroon against a South Africa team coached by Hugo Broos, the Belgian who led the Indomitable Lions to their fifth continental title in Gabon in 2017.

Cameroon, the five-time continental champions, can now go into their quarter-final showdown with Morocco in relaxed mood, knowing the pressure is on the host country.

"I want to savour this victory first of all. The game against Morocco is still a long way away," said Cameroon coach David Pagou, who only took over the team days before the tournament began. "We suffered today even though we won, and I think we all need a rest."

Meanwhile there is major disappointment for Bafana Bafana, who finished third at the 2024 AFCON, but they can console themselves by turning their attentions towards the upcoming World Cup.

RABAT: Cameroon's Christian Kofane (L) scores during the Africa Cup of Nations round-of-16 match against South Africa at Al Medina Stadium.—AFP

"We are not going backwards but we do have to make a good evaluation of what happened here at this tournament as we look forward to the World Cup," said Broos.—AFP